

# BRUSH HAIR TYPES

## BRUSH HAIR

The material used to form the tuft of a brush that picks up and spreads the paint is the most important part of the brush, and determines the performance and the price of the brush. There are distinct advantages of both natural and synthetic hairs.

**NATURAL** or animal hair is a by-product of the food and fur industries. Tiny, microscopic “scales” along the shaft of the hair superior paint-holding ability. Price and performance of a natural hair brush is determined by the “grade” of animal it was taken from, and the availability of its hair. Shorter-length hair is more readily available, making the longer lengths more expensive. Natural hair may be used alone (pure) or blended with other hairs or synthetic filaments to achieve a combination of performance and price.

**SYNTHETICS** are manmade of either nylon or polyester filaments. They can be tapered, tipped, abraded, or etched to increase color-carrying ability. Often, synthetic filaments are dyed and baked to make them softer and more absorbent. The common name for this filament is “Taklon.” The advantages to using synthetic brushes are:

1. They are less prone to damage from solvents, insects or paints.
2. They are easier to keep clean than animal hair brushes because the filaments don't have animal scale structures to trap paint.
3. They are less prone to breakage and are durable on many different surfaces.
4. They are better suited for painting with acrylics because a synthetic filament will withstand the caustic nature of acrylic paints with less damage.

## FYI

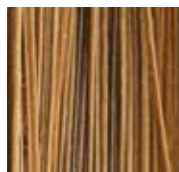
For the protection of the hairs, most brushes are treated with a watersoluble sizing. This should be removed by thoroughly washing with brush soap and water or special brush care products before use.



## KOLINSKY SABLE

is not really sable at all, but comes from the tail of a species of mink that is a member of the weasel family found in Siberia and northeastern China. It is

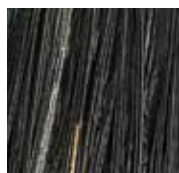
generally conceded to be the best material for oil and watercolor brushes due to its strength, spring, and ability to retain its shape (“snap”). Long, fine hairs hold a very fine point/edge for precise control. Considered a professional-grade hair, Kolinsky will last for many years if properly cared for.



## RED SABLE

comes from any member of the weasel family with red hair — not from the animal known as the sable. It is found in a variety of brush styles for various mediums, with

quality and characteristics that vary greatly. A good-quality pure red sable brush is a good alternative to the more expensive Kolinsky, with similar performance and durability. Often, weasel hair is blended with ox hair to make a more economical brush, but the fine point is sacrificed.



## FITCH HAIR

is a traditional, rare hair for oil painting that is similar to mongoose and sable. Fitch is super smooth, ideal for blending and portrait painting but (unlike sable), does not

have fine hair tips. Sourced from Europe, fitch is a more affordable substitute for sable and great for detail.



## OX HAIR

The best quality ox hair comes from the ears of cattle or oxen. The hair has a very strong body, a silken texture, is very resilient, and has good “snap,” but it lacks a fine tip. Therefore, it

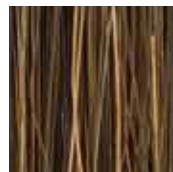
is most useful in medium-grade wash brushes or flat-shaped brushes. Frequently, ox hair is blended with other natural hair to increase the resiliency of a brush.



## SQUIRREL HAIR

Gray squirrel (Talahoutky), most highly in demand for lettering brushes and quills, is native to Russia and nearly always in short supply. Brown squirrel (Kazan) is more readily

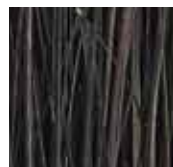
available, and used mainly for medium-quality and scholastic watercolor brushes. A very fine, thin hair taken from the squirrel's tail, it points as well as Kolinsky, but lacks Kolinsky's strength, stiffness, and “snap” (or memory). Because it has the best water-holding capacity of any natural hair brush, it works best with watercolor paints and inks.



## PONY HAIR

The least strong of all the natural hair options, pony hair is primarily used in scholastic-grade brushes and more economical watercolor and touch-up brushes. Pony hair

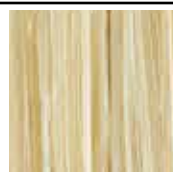
lacks “snap” (or memory) and will not return to a point after a brushstroke.



## CAMEL HAIR

does not actually come from camels. It is found in watercolor and lettering brushes and is usually made of pony, goat, ox, or a blend of several hairs, depending

on the desired softness and intended cost of the brush. Camel hair lacks “snap” (or memory) and will not return to a point after a brushstroke.



## HOG BRISTLE

Sourced from around the world, the most highly sought hog bristle comes from China. It is unlike other natural fillers in that it forms a V-shaped split or “flag” at the tip and

tends to have a natural curve. A brush with “interlocked” bristles has a natural resistance to fraying and spreads medium to thick paints smoothly and evenly. A selection of pure hog bristle brushes is recommended for artists who work with oils and acrylics.



## SYNTHETIC

Developed to mimic the qualities and working properties of the best natural hair brushes, brushes made with synthetic fibers work well with a variety of media and

techniques. Sometimes blended with natural hair, the manmade filaments in these brushes can be stiff, firm, medium, or soft, rivaling natural hair in their performance.

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